Daniel Williams*

Apprentice to Deception: L. P. Hartley and the *Bildungsroman*

Abstract: This essay argues that L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between* (1953) fits into the critical tradition of the *Bildungsroman* in one specific sense: its attention to matters of deception. First, this plot of formation and development involves a necessary apprenticeship in deception: a moral training that has links with everyday practices of concealment in linguistic construal, social etiquette, and interpersonal trust, whose presence I track in the novel. Second, the novel's framing screens the salient context of its production, the 'angry decade' of 1950s Britain. I consider Hartley's conservative distance from other writing on childhood and youth in the period, suggesting that his representation of deception relates to his critique of social and moral erosion in the postwar period. In the loose vehicle of a *Bildungsroman* where development is compromised, Hartley presents a novel whose formal structure, in its use of deceptive tropes, affords both its turning away from historical difficulties and its indirect critique of failing morals.

1 Introduction

> It was literally a moral revolution and accomplished in the depths of her nature. [...] She had a new feeling, the feeling of danger; on which a new remedy rose to meet it, the idea of an inner self or, in other words, of concealment.
> – Henry James, *What Maisie Knew* ([1897] 1985: 43)

No one denied that the summer of 1900 was hot, at least by British standards. Meteorological stations recorded temperatures in excess of 80°F and London saw several July days that climbed beyond 90°F. The newspapers declared a heatwave, there were several deaths from sunstroke, and amateur forecasters led a chorus of laments about the heat.[1] Within a few months the heat would be over

---

1 See weather sections and letters to the editor in *The Times* (1900): July 17 (8, 11), July 18 (13), July 21 (10), July 24 (8), and July 28 (14).

*Corresponding author: Daniel Williams, Harvard University
E-Mail: william1@fas.harvard.edu

and the monarch dead, but the illusion of fine weather would live on into the Edwardian period, recollections of which spotlight a time of summer and sport, lazing and liberalism in the years before World War I. Even historical accounts that recover the tensions and uncertainties of this interregnum cannot always escape its "gospel of fun" (Rose 1986: 163–198). Many advert to the epithet of a 'golden' time taken from Kenneth Grahame's popular children's book, *The Golden Age* (1895).[2]

This tension between objective, factual reality and subjective, mythical appraisal marks *The Go-Between* (1953), a novel set in the Edwardian period by the English novelist L. P. Hartley, named after Leslie Stephen and born in the year Grahame's book was published (Wright 1996: 18). Although the novel's events conform with scrupulous accuracy to details of that sweltering summer, they are suffused with nostalgia and evoke, from the vantage of bleak postwar Britain, "the long stretch of fine weather, and also the confidence in life, the belief that all's well in the world, which everyone enjoyed or seemed to enjoy before the First World War" (Hartley [1953] 2002: 10).[3] The fond and precise rendering of an Edwardian vacation space has earned Hartley tributes for 'vividness' and 'charm' that were already common at the novel's publication (e.g. Wyndham 1953) and have become *de rigueur* since.[4] The sense of Hartley as a "marooned Edwardian" (Allsop 1958: 26) writing novels in an "atmosphere of autumnal understanding" (Wright 1996: 1) was a pose he himself endorsed (Athos 1962: 72). In 1917, during his period of Home Service in World War I, when he briefly served (like the novel's protagonist) as a "postman" for his barracks (Wright 1996: 52), he mused in a letter to his father:

> in normal times the Past stands by you, a kind of harmonising background that justifies what you are; but when the majority of the people have lost the 'Sense of the Past' how is one to rediscover oneself both to oneself and other people? [...] The difficulty is that one cannot gaze into the pool of the past and see one's reflection tranquil there: the spirit of the Present sweeps across and troubles the Waters. (Hartley, qtd. in Wright 1996: 55)

---

2 Priestley (1970: 57) claims that the Edwardian Era was "never a golden age, but seen across the dark years afterwards it could easily be mistaken for one"; cf. Cecil (1969: 129–131).

3 Hartley brings out the association in introducing a later edition of *The Go-Between*, describing that summer as "a kind of Golden Age – almost literally, for I think of it as being the colour of gold" (Hartley [1953] 2002: 7). Elsewhere he used similar terms to describe summers at Harrow ([1932] 1984: 72) and the cultural atmosphere before the war (1968a: 250–251).

4 Hartley's obituary in *The Times* declared: "never has one aspect of the period been caught more richly or with greater intensity" ("Mr. L. P. Hartley" 1972: 19). Such judgments reappear in contemporary guides to English literature (Birch 2009: 463; Head 2006: 489).

Hartley repeatedly tried to fix himself and his novel in a historical context that was only distantly his (in virtue of his childhood). "I didn't want to go back to it", he wrote of the summer of 1900 in a 1963 introduction to *The Go-Between*, "but I wanted it to come back to me, and I still do" ([1953] 2002: 7). "I seem to have become part of my past", he told his friend David Cecil in 1972, the year of his death (Hartley, qtd. in Wright 2004). Blithely accepting such views, we risk eliding the ambient pressures and sociopolitical tensions of his more immediate surround, postwar Britain. We miss how Hartley figures the gesture of turning away in despair from the turbulent "spirit of the Present" in order to claim the past's radical difference – as in the novel's now-proverbial opening: "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there" (5) – and we are in danger of colluding with Hartley's social and moral conservatism.[5] We may miss, ironically by getting too caught up in, the central topics of the novel: the tension between fact and illusion, objective norms and subjective interpretations – deception, in short, of others and oneself.

Building on Christoph Schöneich's (1999: 140–141) description of Hartley's novel as a "Bildungsroman *manqué*", I argue that *The Go-Between* fits into the critical tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, at least in its nineteenth-century and modernist manifestations in the British context, in one specific sense: its attention to matters of deception.[6] This plot of formation and development involves a necessary apprenticeship in deception: a moral training that has links with everyday practices of concealment in linguistic construal, social etiquette, and interpersonal trust. The nineteenth-century European *Bildungsroman*, in an account articulated by Georg Lukács ([1920] 1971) and extended by Franco Moretti ([1987] 2000), negotiates a shaky compromise between personal meaning and impersonal causality. In the *Bildungsroman* "the subjective yearning for 'meaning' is entirely satisfied by, and subsumed under the objective legislation of 'causality'" (Moretti [1987] 2000: 69). What is curious about Hartley's novel, in this scheme, is that its protagonist – as both an adult narrator and a younger self whose traumatic summer the novel uncovers and relates – is caught between one system that is too subjective and another that is not objective enough. On one hand, the child's obsession with magic and the occult gives rise to a formation that reveals astrological symbolism and spell casting as subsumed by a system where signs are multivalent and magic does not work. On the other, the system of language and communicative action to which the child adjusts himself entails compromise. Where conversation in the novel involves the construal of meaning, etiquette, and

---

5 References to *The Go-Between* ([1953] 1997) appear henceforth in parentheses in the text.
6 Mulkeen (1974: 9) and Jones (1978: 31) mention the term 'Bildungsroman' in passing.

what the philosopher H. P. Grice (1989: 22–57) calls 'implicature', subjective appraisals are met *not* by an objective system but by a code where deception and insincerity are rife. The subject is engulfed by a quasi-objective code that henceforth provides the scripts and protocols for communicative action. If the familiar hero of the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* has been defined as "someone who gives shape to events without actually causing them" (Hirsch 1979: 297), Hartley's central character unmistakably causes events without fully apprehending their shape, particularly their shape in idiomatic inference and linguistic concealment.

The novel's framing also works to instantiate a broader deflection: it screens the salient context of its production, the 'angry decade' of 1950s Britain where Hartley and his "curtly dignified initials" (Allsop 1958: 34) were so out of place. Reading the novel in light of Hartley's prolific reviews and essays leading into the postwar moment and beyond, I end by considering his conservative distance from other writing on childhood and youth in this "irreparably split, genuinely transitional" (Ferrebe 2012: 6) period – writing that has been seen to typify 'prolonged adolescence' (Schlüssel 2005). In often "self-contradicting, double-voiced" texts (Ferrebe 2012: 10), literary and sociological writers investigated anomie, social disaffection, and loneliness. In literature this work included John Wain's *Hurry on Down* (1953), William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954), Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1955), John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958), the stories of Alan Sillitoe, and the early collections of Philip Larkin, starting with the aptly named *The Less Deceived* (1955).[7] In other fields we could point to Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* (1950) and Colin Wilson's meditation on alienation, *The Outsider* (1956).[8] Hartley's evasion of the alienating context in which he writes, by means of the 'golden' filter of the early 1900s, works precisely through tactics of novelistic deception that will later be adapted by British authors like John Fowles, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Ian McEwan. But where these authors represent and critique historical myopia and self-deception through the vehicle of unreliable historical fiction, Hartley's target – the loss of individual moral conscience in postwar, welfare Britain – is an elliptical one.

The stakes of this essay are thus twofold. First, showing how *The Go-Between* spotlights ambivalent codes as central to subject formation – even at the risk of a

---

7 Joseph Losey's film version of *The Go-Between* (1971) does feature a screenplay by Pinter, but the irony with which the film approaches the text may do more to cement than undercut the opposition between Hartley and the Angry Young Men. For readings of the film version see Wood (1971); Gordon (1972); Jones (1973); Grossvogel (1974); Riley and Palmer (1978); Sinyard (1980); and Gray (2007).

8 On literature and social concern about 'youth' in the 1950s see Ferrebe (2012: 19–38), with a brief discussion of Hartley (20–22).

traumatic self-deception that could erase, rather than form a subject – I sketch one level of the *Bildungsroman* as a genre of pretense and opaque communication. Second, arguing that this representation of an apprenticeship in deception dramatizes the novel's deflection of context, I also show how it encodes a conservative critique through which Hartley counts the personal and historical cost of such practices of socialization. If many accounts of the *Bildungsroman* see the structure that individual formation at once adjusts to, and thereby discloses, as the nation-state (Lukács [1920] 1971; Moretti [1987] 2000; Esty 2012), the deformation of Hartley's central character and narrative voice could be taken as faulting this overarching social telos.[9]

Earlier touchstones in the *Bildungsroman* tradition, ever a loose and shifting canon, naturally involve instances of deception, insincerity, secrecy, and disillusionment (e.g. Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Gustave Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale*, Stendhal's *Le rouge et le noir*), and these may be connected to the tensions, ambivalences, and occlusions that mark this genre from its contested outset.[10] Hartley's novel shares elements, too, with a variety of *fin-de-siècle* and modernist texts by Rudyard Kipling, Kenneth Grahame, James Joyce, Henry James, and Elizabeth Bowen, among others. Even though its credentials in this company are tenuous and its only colonial connection the Anglo-Boer War (from which one character returns), the novel does have points of contact with modernist, cosmopolitan, and colonial narratives of youth and development, analyzed variously by Gregory Castle (2006), Tobias Boes (2012), and Jed Esty (2012). Hartley's work could be seen to participate in those tropes of stalled formation and "antidevelopmental temporality" that, in Esty's account, yield novels with "youthful protagonists who die young, remain suspended in time, eschew vocational and sexual closure, refuse social adjustment" (Esty 2012: 3). Like others in the modernist camp, the novel draws energy from "the breakdown of traditional forms of identity and of normative, harmonious socialization" (Castle 2006: 5) and can be deemed to trade "fulfillment in a normative ideal" for a "performative response to a crisis in historical understanding" (Boes 2012: 7).[11] What seems unusual in Hartley is that his response is formally indirect and socially conservative: the novel's formal structure, in its use of deceptive tropes, affords both a

---

9 For a critique of such views see Boes (2012: 20–31). Against the "implicit commitment to totality, teleology, and normativity [that] has shaped the critical discourse on the *Bildungsroman*" (2012: 16), Boes offers a cosmopolitan reading (31–42).

10 See, among many critical appraisals of the genre, Sammons (1981) and Redfield (1996).

11 Hartley's novel might also be contrasted with the middlebrow *Bildungsroman* at midcentury, which in Perrin's (2011) account of the American context critiques modernist writing and ambivalently recovers a concept of *Bildung*.

turning away from contemporaneous difficulties and a metanarrative critique of presently eroding morals. He is not simply one of the 1950s writers who "appeared to cultivate the art of avoiding the present" (Ritchie 1988: 9). The opacity, pretense, and deflection in which the novel manifestly partakes allow Hartley to embed an indirect critique of his society and the devaluing of individual responsibility at the hands of the new welfare state.

2 Dunce Metaphysics: Private Codes, Social Secrets

> Superstition is knowledge, because it sees together the ciphers of destruction scattered on the social surface; it is folly because in all its death-wish it still clings to illusions: expecting from the transfigured shape of society misplaced in the skies an answer that only a study of real society can give.
> – Theodor W. Adorno, "Theses Against Occultism" ([1951] 1978: 130)

The protagonist of *The Go-Between* is twelve-year-old Leo Colston, who while summering at the rented country-house of his friend Marcus Maudsley finds himself the messenger for an illicit affair taking place between Marcus's sister Marian and Ted Burgess, a local farmer. Leo's gradual realization of the import of his messages gives way to a shocking discovery of adult sexuality – a trauma that has left his adult self, the narrator, with deep emotional scars.[12] It is that self who, cleaning out his attic on a winter evening in 1952, comes across his diary for the year 1900. The schoolboy tome, adorned with the signs of the Zodiac, forms the touchstone for his uncertain self-analysis, as he confronts the symbols scrawled by his younger self and maps out the causal history of his melancholy adulthood. The diary reveals Leo's interests in the occult, and its transition from one level (spell-casting) to another (Zodiacal forecasting) marks an initial collision between subjective and objective appraisals of the world. It is significant that the *adult* narrator co-opts this symbolic register: the hold of superstition remains even after

---

12 For Wright (1996) the autobiographical truth of the central trauma in *The Go-Between* remains unclear. Yet Hartley does take the plot from experience. Having befriended a younger boy, Moxey (Maudsley), at Northdown (Southdown) Hill preparatory school in 1909, he summered with the family at Bradenham (Brandham) Hall in Norfolk, rented from the family of the novelist H. Rider Haggard (Wright 1996: 30–33). In an early review Hartley (1949: 302) rejects narrative omniscience: a novelist should allow his characters "an independent being, a heart of mystery into which he cannot penetrate".

Leo's compromised development has shown the occult to be a flawed way of handling reality.[13] Leo's encounters with the occult represent for the child an inchoate grasping towards the inefficacy of subjective codes and purely 'private' languages, and for the adult a way to reprise a sense-making practice that turns out to break its promises once again.

When his diary is discovered at school, Leo is mercilessly mocked and in retaliation he scribes three curses against his assailants. When two curses go too far – their targets slip off a roof and are concussed – Leo is cheered by his "public reputation" (14) for magic yet terrified at the seeming efficacy of his powers. He becomes a "recognized authority" on "black magic and code-making", a known "master of language" advising on occult matters (for a small fee), and invents a language that others take up around him (14). His second spell, bringing about the premature closure of school through an outbreak of measles, leaves him with the "thrilling sense of having been favoured by fortune" (23). His victory, ambiguously gained "by myself, or at any rate without calling in the help of any human agency" (15), declares a confident selfhood: "I felt that I was someone" (21). Although he views this achievement with irony, his superstition is clear in his refusal to translate the curses: "Kept secret, they would still minister to my prestige; revealed, and used by irresponsible people, who knew what harm they might do?" (15).

In order to adjust to social expectations, Leo has to exchange his private code for a related, publicly sanctioned language. The elder Lionel feels "a certain envy of the self in those days, who would not take things lying down, who had no notion of appeasement, and who was prepared to put all he had into making himself respected in society" (12).[14] Yet the *form* of this social adjustment is based on bogus content: "Comprehensible [the spells] never were, for they made no sense: I concocted them out of figures and algebraical symbols and what I remembered of some Sanskrit characters" (11). By contrast, the signs of the Zodiac offer an accepted (if notoriously malleable) system of meaning, "each somehow contriving to suggest a plenitude of life and power" (7). He remembers "their

---

13 On the popularity of occultism and astrology in the Edwardian period see Curry (1992: 9–17, 122–159). These motifs are central in Edwardian children's literature: "a sense of adult loss or longing in connection with childhood, the centrality of the child at play in the home or garden, society's views of what children need or should be, and the child's connection with savagery and the pagan" (Gavin and Humphries 2009: 5). On childhood in the period see Cecil (1969: 132–155); March-Russell (2009); and Walvin (1982: 79–109, 182–192).

14 In 'appeasement' Hartley may hear a specific sense referring to Neville Chamberlain's attempted "conciliation by concession" with Germany before World War II (*OED* s.v. *appeasement* n., def. 4).

shapes and attitudes" and, "though it was no longer potent for me, the magic with which they were then invested" (7).

The flexibility of this sign system allows the elder Lionel to describe the dynamics of the relationships he remembers. Having lost the "faculty [...] of pretending that I was an animal", Leo rejects the Lion as his sign and considers two other possibilities: the Archer (Sagittarius), "strong and sturdy", suggesting the romantic character of war; and the Water-Carrier (Aquarius), "a useful member of society", but only as one of the lower classes (8). These "august and legendary figures" (47) match the characters Leo encounters at Brandham Hall. Hugh Winlove, the ninth Viscount Trimingham and owner of the mansion rented by the Maudsleys, represents Sagittarius. Ted Burgess, the tenant of Black Farm, stands for Aquarius, often seen in water and so semi-naked, his "powerful body" confronting Leo with "maturity in its most undeniable form" (52).[15] Lastly, Virgo, the "key to the whole pattern, the climax, the coping-stone, the goddess – for my imagination was then, though it is no longer, passionately hierarchical" (7), finds form in Marian, affianced to Trimingham while carrying on an illicit affair with Ted.

Hartley's inclusion of these zany motifs has been praised for capturing a child's penchant for spaces sequestered from everyday practices and dismissed for overburdening the novel with blatant keys to interpretation.[16] Yet it is the interpretive *ad infinitum* of the Zodiac (other hermeneutics of suspicion look sedate by comparison) that critical approaches miss when they read the novel as though it were a horoscope.[17] Indeed, it is startling to find Hartley *himself* direct-

---

15 Ted recalls Oliver Mellors, in D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as Hugh does Clifford Chatterley (Schöneich 1999: 136; Ingersoll 2004: 244). Hartley (1928b: 706) acknowledged that Lawrence's "gift is his own, incommunicable, a kind of genius", but disdained his preoccupation with sex; he later softened his view: "Perhaps everyone has a right to invent his or her own moral code; but unless it has relevance to other peoples', it must be slightly suspect" (Hartley 1970: 902).
16 In a review in the same issue of *TLS* as Hartley's "The Novelist and his Material", C. P. Snow (1958) criticizes symbolism as "too coarse-meshed an attack on anything as delicate in detail and highly articulated as the novel" and finds its presence unfortunate in Hartley and E. M. Forster. Another reviewer complained about the "conscious imposition of almost every possible external pattern and order – climatic, magical, anthropological, vegetable, animal, mechanical, historical, psychoanalytic – upon rather thin and statically conceived events and characters" (Mudrick 1955: 615).
17 Some of these readings acquire credence by subsuming the Zodiac under "romance": see Mulkeen (1974); Moan (1973: 27–36); Pritchard (1980: 47–49); and Schöneich (1999: 135–136). Freudian readings include Bien (1963: 167–183); Radley (1987: 1–10); and Higdon (1984: 30–32). I agree with Grossvogel's assessment that the Zodiac is a "charade" (1974: 52), a narrative distraction from the plot's social facts, but there are better explanations than saying "a thirteen-year-old cannot be as adroit as a well-read author in stringing together symbolic figures" (1974: 55).

ing a critical attack on an earlier novel by targeting exactly those elements that were to be mocked in *The Go-Between*. Criticizing the "peculiarity" of Edward Sackville-West's *Mandrake over the Water-Carrier* (1928), he pointed to its "elaborate symbolism, expressed by the machinery of mandrakes, witches, visions and the Signs of the Zodiac" (Hartley 1928c: 843).

Reading along with the Zodiac ignores the elder Lionel's complex relationship to his occult history. Certainly he looks back on his spells and interest in the Zodiac as "mumbo-jumbo", part of a "gross piece of quackery" that now seems "the actions of another person" (227). Lionel sees his younger self as wearing a "dunce's cap" (244) on the last page of the novel, as Mrs. Maudsley drags that self off to the outhouses during a thunderstorm, where they will see Ted and Marian *in flagrante delicto*. Yet Lionel also assesses that fateful summer using an occult lexicon – its agents are "immortals" (246) – and elaborates Zodiacal possibilities that he elsewhere retracts. The period is a "Bluebeard's chamber" (249) in his head, a location where he can reanimate and give credence to subjective constellations that the events of 1900 have shown to be misguided.

Returning to the occult under the cover of narrating childhood Leo's "zodiacal reveries" (9), the elder Lionel participates in what Adorno calls an "*ideology for dependence*" (1994: 114). By "localizing free-floating anxieties in some definite symbolism", Adorno asserts, astrology offers comfort by restoring the idea of a hidden sense in the context of senselessness, leading to both "spurious understanding and flight into a supposedly higher realm", even though this may turn out to be a "false revelation" in the guise of a "hallucinated phenomenon" (1994: 116, 117; [1951] 1978: 128). The child (Leo) once took up all the elements of magic, superstition, and occultism that, in adults who subscribe to the same irrational or pseudo-rational beliefs, earn them the epithet 'children'.[18] The adult (Lionel) returns to these practices, trying to find through this "metaphysic of dunces" (Adorno [1951] 1978: 130), the rich, sense-laden reality it once proffered his younger self. But as he tracks the course of his failed *Bildung* once again, he finds in all these platitudes only a "worthless magic" masquerading as "nothing other than the worthless existence it lights up" (Adorno [1951] 1978: 131).[19]

Leo's experiences are gradually jettisoned in favor of more systematic modes of evaluating the world, but they do introduce one lesson – the felt importance of

---

18 Many Edwardian adults engaged in such pursuits, whether in response to an instrumentalized world (March-Russell 2009: 30–31) or in infantile retreat (Rose 1986: 4–12).

19 Adorno and Hartley are strange bedfellows but agree on some criticisms of modern society. Hartley's (1968a: 251) lament concerning "the indifference to sense, morality, and genuine emotion that goes with jazz", which has left the world "slightly out of tune ever since" is in harmony with Adorno's notorious "Über Jazz" ([1936] 1982).

privacy and secrecy – that will stay with him through his adult life. As a child, Leo is proud of his diary, wanting to show it to everyone, but he also feels in respect of its contents an "instinct for secrecy" (9). He restores its pages in the cool solitude of the school lavatory; in the same "privacy of [...] retreat" (11) he concocts his curses; and he guards this "need of being alone" (79) later on, when reading letters and carrying messages. In a later essay titled "Some Aspects of Gregariousness" Hartley argues the essential separateness of individuals, declares that solitude "in its greatest intensity is in the nature of a discovery", and suggests that literature's goal is "the strengthening and extension of our capacity for solitude" (Hartley 1967: 200, 203). In the same period that British psychoanalysis was describing solitude not as an infantile retreat but as a hard-won achievement of adulthood – centrally in the work of D. W. Winnicott – the narrator of *The Go-Between* recognizes how privacy and the ability to be alone are benefits purchased by the developing individual through rejecting the codes of children, whose "worlds are private" and whose "games are mysteries" (94).[20]

3 Questionable Traffic: Idiom, Implicature, Deception

The success of his spells leads to a swing in self-regard for Leo, from being "too self-distrustful" to being "over-confident": "I did not believe that my happiness was contingent on anything: I felt that the laws of reality had been suspended on my behalf" (24–25). Yet the occult provides only erratic instruments for measuring social progress. Curses either 'work' or not; Zodiacal signs either 'fit' with their characters or not. In the plot of the novel, which could be described as a *Bildungsroman* in reverse, it is the failed adjustment of personal codes to worldly norms that allows Leo to discern a normalized place without being able to take it up. Leo's role as a messenger or "postman" (104) for Marian, Ted, and Hugh promises his acceptance in society but actually gives rise to traumatic disappointment. These events turn on a difference more pervasive than that between personal and public, subjective and objective, namely the problem of duplicity in language. Both deception (intentional) and conversational misfires (unintentional) violate rules for how best to interpret, construe, and manipulate spoken language. Beginning with the work of the philosopher J. L. Austin in the same

---

20 See Winnicott, "The Capacity to be Alone" (1958: 416–420); cf. Fromm-Reichmann (1959); Burton (1961).

period as Hartley's novel, the codification of maxims, conditions, and rules for ordinary language has commissioned some ingenious responses. Austin's nexus of concerns from *How to Do Things With Words* to other papers published during this time – "Other Minds" (1946), "How to Talk – Some Simple Ways" (1953), and "Pretending" (1958) – map the contours of my argument in linking together communication, interpersonal relations, and deception.[21]

In *The Go-Between* a subjective sense of the world's meaning is thwarted by attempts to understand intricacies in the adult code, which is *not* an objective but an opaque system that often depends on saying more, less, or otherwise than one means. Following Fiona MacArthur's (1988, 1990, 1992) deployment of stylistics and the philosophy of language to read Hartley, I track the novel's hapless misunderstandings and malevolent communiqués, from quite simple problems of idiom, figure, and etiquette to more vexed questions of sincerity and trust in speech. Leo's overall adjustment to the 'way of the world', I argue, concerns less the facts of the matter – that adult sexuality takes place in dereliction of duties – than the manner in which such facts are carried on, papered over, and (sometimes) brought to light. The child discovers for himself that, as Hans-Georg Gadamer describes in *Truth and Method*, in "situations where coming to an understanding is disrupted or impeded, we first become conscious of the conditions of all understanding" (2003: 386). Instead of finding that subjective meaning cedes to objective arrangements – magic does not 'work'; the Zodiac is 'worthless' – Leo encounters an endlessly receding objectivity where failure to understand others can lead, paradoxically, to an erasure of the self.

The unequivocal manner of speaking and behaving that Leo observes at school does not prepare him for the perils of adult communication. At Southdown, a straightforward "code" of speech and action holds: Leo is only "Colston", masking his first and middle names, his address and family background, "not from any wish for concealment, but because our code discouraged personal disclosures" (21). Importantly, the "code" encourages deception by omission or exaggeration, but rules regarding "sneaking" (11) are easily policed so that the language of home, with its "unadorned vocabulary" (59), becomes radically dissociated from the lexicon of school. This division carries over into Leo's letters to his mother, in which he has to "edit and bowdlerize", omitting *his* interpreta-

---

[21] *How to Do Things With Words* (Austin 1975) comprises lectures delivered at Oxford in 1951–1954, and at Harvard in 1955. The other papers are collected in *Philosophical Papers* (Austin 1970). See also the later work of H. P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (1989), who proposes an influential account of conversational 'implicature' according to 'maxims' that are routinely followed or violated.

tions of, for example, the success of his spells and the "intoxicating transition from a trough of persecution to a pedestal of power" (22).

Leo's arrival at Brandham, by contrast, signals his initiation into a more complex environment where the code is as different as a "foreign language": the divine speech or "star-talk" (84) of the Zodiac figures. The inhabitants of the Hall are "a race apart [...] not bound by the same laws of life as little boys" (64), and "their meaning was as obscure to me as the meaning of the curses I had called down on Jenkins and Strode" (16). Mrs. Maudsley's invitation letter, with its "conventional phrases [that] implied a deep and sympathetic interest in my personality" (26), captures in advance the "mystery" (31) of the Hall, where Leo's early days are "floating impressions [...] making little sense, let alone a story" (33). His early misapprehensions issue from schoolboy concerns, as when he finds in the elder Maudsley son, Denys, "a conceited expression (schoolboys are quick to diagnose conceit)" (31), and detects sarcasm, the "schoolboy's bugbear" (37), in another. While he puzzles out such posturing and teasing, the "mild persecution [...] concealed in smiles and kindly faces" (38), Leo also finds out from Marcus that the code has been suspended here in the Norfolk countryside. Marcus insistently counsels Leo not to be like the "cads" (37) by wearing his school kit or by behaving according to rules that no longer hold. He tells his mother about Leo's magic – which the latter deems a "breach of trust" (31) – but Leo then finds that Marian, conversely, has forgotten his "oyster-like disclosure" (60) about his family: different standards sow confusion.[22]

A self-confessed "stickler for codes" (111), Leo decides he will make every effort to understand, despite his dim "experience of social usage" (64).[23] In the realm of etiquette and class-appropriate communication, he makes several *faux pas*. Addressing Trimingham who, as a Viscount, cannot take a normal prefix, Leo tries to divine his name from the disfigured face, and his realization is like the "dawn of the unimaginable" (65). With regard to pronunciation, his middle-class accent, unable to aspirate an *h*, leads to some amusing reactions from Marian: "'Hugh asked me to tell you–' / [...] 'Who asked you to tell me?'" (66). Despite her efforts to instruct him, Leo's persistent confusion tellingly points to his broader inability to convert private understanding into public comprehensibility: "[Marian:] 'Hugh, you know Hugh' / [Leo:] 'Yes, of course I know myself'" (89). After

---

22 Piaget (1965: 29) discusses the initially "mystical attitude" that children have towards rules, which gives way to accepting and modifying them in social settings. He further notes that children go through stages in their own acquisition and development of "a code of laws and a system of jurisprudence" (Piaget 1965: 46).

23 Notably 'stickler' means a moderator, umpire, or mediator before it means insistent advocate (*OED* s.v. *stickler* n., def. 1a and 4): it could be seen as another form of 'go-between'.

such embarrassments he will long for his "pre-Brandham state of mind, with nobody's standards to live up to except my own" (183), a place where "characters are not obscured by a veil of good manners" (205).[24]

Struggling in the context of social rules, Leo begins his work as a go-between with an unprepared response to Hugh's question about what he would do for Marian:

> "I'd do anything for her".
> "What would you do?"
> I scented a trap in this; I felt I had been caught out boasting. There was so little I could do for her that would sound important. Thinking of what it was within the compass of small boys to do [...]. (66)

As Leo's "compass" widens, his tasks take him further than mere etiquette and correct pronunciation into a domain where adults *seem* to say otherwise than they mean, a state of affairs immediately seen in Trimingham's disappointment with Marian's reply: "Is that all she said?" (67). In similar fashion, Ted is called out for an illogical statement after dismissing any relations with those at the Hall: "I don't have much to do with those grand folks" (73). His riposte is similarly veiled: "She does know me, in a way" (77). Leo adopts this kind of omission, so that when he takes messages to Ted and slides down the straw rick for fun, he can relate the latter activity to the adults and still be telling the "perfect truth" (94).

"If only grown-ups would be more explicit!" (191), he thinks nonetheless. The further he proceeds in his adventures in implicature, the thornier the issues become. The problem of omission, where adults hide untruths in language they *know* to say more than it tepidly suggests, is relatively easy. Innuendo presents greater difficulties. When Leo catches Ted out in the cricket match, his apology – "'I didn't really mean to catch you out'" – brims with unrecognized irony, and Ted's response unwittingly summarizes the dynamic of the child's incomprehension: "'I thought "It'll go right over his head", [...] but I never thought I'd be caught out by our postman'" (128). Coercing Leo into carrying messages that are all 'over his head' – just as the lewd pictures in the men's smoking-room are "above his head" (190) – Ted is 'caught out' when his affair with Marian is revealed.[25] There is a tension here between such screened implications and mere etiquette, where veiled and low-affect gestures signal admission to adult society:

---

24 For further comments on etiquette, spoken respect, and pronunciation in Hartley see MacArthur (1988: 201–210) and (1992: 45, 60–62, 113).

25 This idiom is indebted to Kenneth Grahame: "It was a perennial matter for amazement how these Olympians would talk over our heads [...] of this or the other social or political inanity" ([1895] 1979: 16).

Trimingham's "reserved and understated" compliment on Leo's cricket catch is conspicuously an "address to a *man*" (127, my emphasis).

Leo tends to find himself on the outside of adult conversation, at least in part because he considers talking "for the sake of talking" to be a "strange pursuit" (76), mere "trifling, purposeless, unanchored talk" (84). "I should have understood the words", he notes, "but not what made them say them" (82). He has not yet grasped what Gadamer calls the "*horizon of the question*", whereby understanding entails questioning "what lies behind what is said", since if "we go back *behind* what is said, then we inevitably ask questions *beyond* what is said" (2003: 363). Instead of seeing in conversation the activity of "talking at cross purposes and seeing each other's point" (Gadamer 2003: 362), Leo is baffled by idioms. What could it mean that Ted is "a bit of a lad" (85) or a "lady-killer" (188)? One unfortunate gaffe involves taking "on the cards" to mean "some very remote contingency" (191): when Leo tells Marian that Ted's conscription is "on the cards" she explodes (209). In other moments, idiomatic understanding is clearly limited by contextual learning: Trimingham catches Leo slinking off and notes that he is trying "to sneak past in dead ground", where the military sense is not caught but the "general purport of the accusation is quite clear" (88).[26] Leo's lack of facility provokes further blunders. Having worked out how to approach Hugh correctly, he blurts out a joke that falls flat because the levels of suggestion have differing valences: "You are a guest in your own house!" (67).

Idiomatic usage represents one of the more complex and contextual ways of saying less, more, or otherwise than one means. The paradigmatic instance in the novel involves 'spooning', an endlessly vague term (probably borrowed from Grahame) that connotes some "aspect of grown-up behaviour that we found the silliest" (98), which does not admit of clarity no matter how many times it is joked about, mentioned, or even translated.[27] Leo's initiation into the "facts of life" (106) – another euphemism for this sphere of adulthood (Walvin 1982: 135–148) – is promised when Ted describes how a horse with foal "did a bit of spooning" (107). He tries to divine the sense and conditions of 'spooning', such as whether it

---

26 MacArthur (1990: 105–107) observes that children can grasp certain metaphors deemed "transparent", within available boundaries of context, but not those deemed "opaque", which draw on registers of knowledge or experience to which they have little access.

27 Leo tries a French parallel, "*faire le cuiller*" (178), and confuses Marcus (there is no such idiom in French). Grahame uses the term in *The Golden Age* and in the earlier *Pagan Papers* (1894), from which the *OED*'s citation seems apposite: "When a Fellow was spooning his sister once, they used to employ him to carry notes" (*OED* s.v. *spoon* v.[2], def. 7). Craik (2005: 125–141) has identified several further borrowings from Grahame: the conceit of a secret drawer and found miscellany; objects from the past speaking to the present; the child's privacy; the go-between; the adults as "Olympians"; the Zodiac; and the village-hall sing-along.

necessarily entails marriage or love (107–109), but when the time for explanation comes, the meaning of spooning is seen to include the deferral that is part of this area of discourse.[28] Ted tries to avoid Leo's question, changing the subject, using "a trick all grown-ups had" (163). Its meaning is "something else" (163), somewhere else, for another moment. As Ted fumbles for a definition by way of comparison to what Leo likes "doing best, and then some more" (164), the kettle boils over, returning us to a crude metaphoric level.

As Leo learns idiomatic language he is learning through the deceptive practices that such language enables. Using idioms leads him to a sharper definition of *lying* – of what it entails, when it is appropriate, and why it may occur.[29] His own small lies are the result of social pressures and awkwardness, the "frightful feeling of being marked out for ridicule", the "fear of losing face", of being a "figure of fun" (38).[30] His tactic in escaping such situations consists, on one hand, of struggling for a "verbal quip" (39) that would invert adult sarcasm and, on the other, of telling blatant but inconsequential untruths (as he would at school). The first tactic is often successful: he parries Marian, who asks him whether she should buy him a "lion-skin" to wear, by suggesting that it "might be rather hot" (40). But when she suggests that his having left his summer clothes at home is a "myth" (42), the second approach confuses him. Keeping a "shared secret" (42) with Marian allows her to manipulate him, as though lying were an index of social inclusion. When she conceals a meeting with Ted from her mother by suggesting to Leo that they spent the entire day shopping in Norwich, Leo consents to the fiction, "so eager to agree" (45). These examples give the lie to Moretti's claim, after Lionel Trilling, that alongside "security, stability, and transparency" the "highest virtue of the English novelistic hero" is "sincerity" (Moretti [1987] 2000: 200).

Guarding the confidences of another involves more than successful deceptions: it also requires a fine-tuned sense of trustworthiness that may also be subject to damage. The problem of trust across age group and social class is at issue when Leo, who is "old enough to recognize a debt" (74), offers to do something for Ted in exchange for bandaging his knee after an accident on the farmer's straw rick:

---

28 On Leo's failure to understand sexual idioms see MacArthur (1990: 107–108).

29 Piaget's work on practices of lying among children suggests that learning involves distinguishing intentional deceit from errors: the "obligation not to lie, imposed by adult constraint, appears from the first in its most external form" (1965: 147) and is thus susceptible of further manipulation from outside (1965: 156). On children as moral agents see Coles (1981; 1986).

30 See Bok (1999: 57–72) on 'white lies', fictions which all the participants in a social situation recognize as lies, but which persist to ease social situations.

> "I wonder if I could trust you", was the next thing he said.
> I was very much taken aback, and half offended; but only half, because I thought it must be prelude to a confidence.
> However, I said rather indignantly: "Of course you can. My report said I was trustworthy; 'a trustworthy boy', the Headmaster said". (75)

Such tautologies – Leo is trustworthy because said to be "trustworthy" – are only the surface difficulties of trust as a phenomenon. As the philosopher Annette Baier (1992) has argued, any gesture of making explicit ("Trust me!") suggests that trust is already undermined.[31] Ted's continued probing tries to ascertain trust perversely through linguistic innuendo:

> "But when you are together, chatting – ?"
> I nodded. We were together, chatting.
> "You are near enough to her – ?"
> "Near enough?" I repeated. "Well of course, her dress – "
> "Yes, yes", said he, taking that point too. "These dresses spread out quite a long way. But near enough to – give her something?"
> "Give her something?" I said. "Oh yes, I could give her something".
> It sounded like a disease; my mind was still slightly preoccupied by measles. (75)

When Marian tries a similar suggestion, Leo notes, "I was rather bored by all these injunctions to secrecy. Grown-ups didn't seem to realize that for me, as for most other schoolboys, it was easier to keep silent than to speak. I was a natural oyster" (81). Meant to establish trust but based on deceptive practices, these open queries make Leo suspicious about the relationship between Ted and Marian. Ted says that the messages are "business" (77) but Leo "only half believed in this" (95). He can find "no hypothesis" that "quite worked" (95), and so finds himself in a world where meanings no longer issue by his own fiat but have to be inferred from idiomatic and figurative infidelities. Are they doing "Business"? "Betting"? (95) Comparing notes on the weather? When Leo resists Marian, dimly sensing that his messages are part of an illicit structure, she closes the gap between trust and deception by trying to erect an exchange arrangement: "How much do you want, you little Shylock?" (154). Henceforth he recognizes the "calculation" under her "apparent inconsequence" (182), and the final betrayal of trust makes clear that the adult Lionel's sexual and emotional aridity is a result of what Baier describes

---

31 Baier notes that "resentment of the responsibility" conferred by trust and "a too calculative weighing of the costs of untrustworthiness and the benefits of trustworthiness" may both indicate that grounds for trust have lapsed: "Healthy trust rarely needs to declare itself" (1992: 112, 113). Intriguingly given the topics of *The Go-Between*, Baier's discussions of trust often mention the fidelity of mail carriers (1992: 134–135; 1986: 239; 1989: 278).

as the "lasting inability to partake of [any] trust-dependent good" (1992: 130) after an erosion of trust.

This "clandestine traffic" (96) has made Leo competent in trust-based deception and separated him off from the world of childhood friends like Marcus. Though "an uncritical upholder of the no-sneaking tradition" at school, Leo is now "practised in deceit" (97) and keeps his friend in the dark about his sister, even though he cannot quite say why: "I carried about with me something that made me dangerous, but what it was and why it made me dangerous, I had no idea" (116). Later, it seems as though Leo has himself become the source for the entire plot: "I was a Tower of Silence on which lay whitening the bones of a dead secret – no, not dead in that sense, but very much alive and death-dealing and fatal" (205). Circumstances force him to adapt the contradictory rules he has learnt – "whatever happened it was never a lady's fault" (151) – in order to forestall clarity or realization.[32] When Marian hastily hands him an unsealed letter, he considers his options: "Among the complexities of our code was a very wholesome respect for the Eleventh Commandment" – 'Thou shalt not be found out'[33] – but, failing this, a "strong sense of justice" (99) dictates what should take place. Although the rules for reading letters are clearly defined (99–100), Leo falls short in knowing what to do: "I hesitated because I wasn't sure she had meant me to read the letter. The others had been sealed. She had given me this one in a hurry; she might have meant to seal it" (100). Difficulties of linguistic construal now move into the moral domain, for Leo's schoolboy code accorded "great weight to facts and very little to intentions" and he now has to begin the "unfamiliar toils of moral casuistry" (100). But he makes a beginner's error, avoiding a sensible inference (where meaning might amount to 'meaning well') and jumping to the unlikely if attractive possibility that Marian might have "*wanted* me to read the letter" (100). He opens the envelope, sees the word "darling" (101), and the veil falls.[34]

Hartley's peculiar sensitivity to the child's perception allows each stage of revelation to take effect slowly while further puzzles come into view. In this he shows his debt to Henry James's similar story, *What Maisie Knew* (1897), and perhaps more proximately to the fiction of his friend and correspondent Elizabeth

---

32 Compare the rule (voiced by Trimingham) to Mr. Wilcox's in *Howard's End*: "But women may say anything – it was one of his holiest beliefs" (Forster [1910] 1973: 152).

33 This usage dates to 1886 (*OED* s.v. *commandment* n., def. 2d).

34 This detail probably alludes to Kipling's story "Children of the Zodiac", in which the figures Leo and Virgo decide to surrender their immortality, having realized the power of love. When they meet a mortal couple, Leo tries to indicate their new "understanding" and asks after the word "darling", the "new name" by which the man refers to his wife ([1891] 1893: 403).

Bowen, in novels like *The Last September* (1929) and *The Death of the Heart* (1938).[35] Leo cannot grasp the underlying causal structure of Ted and Marian's affair, for "the force that drew them together" seems to him as opaque as the laws governing the weather, "the force that drew the steel to the magnet" (109). He is sure that his postal tasks will end since, "ignorant as I was of love affairs, and little as I knew about their conventions, I felt sure that when a girl was engaged to a man she did not write letters to another man calling him 'darling'" (143).[36] But this plight of insecure knowledge gives rise to moral hesitancy. When he questions Trimingham about his ancestor who was killed in a duel over his wife, Leo only dismisses the "parallel" after entertaining it, and his disclaimer – "so sure was I that Marian had given up being too friendly with Ted" (148) – now seems forced.

He will only later recognize Marian's "ulterior motive" (155), and then retro-actively cast all her actions as pretense, inveigling, and "duplicity", considering her more Janus-faced than Hugh (156). The friendly carrying of letters he finally disparages as "the message business" (157), and Marian's gift of the Lincoln green suit emerges as a uniform of deception, the "vesture of my make-believe", a "motley" (229) that implies the costume of a harlequin or clown, and so casts aspersions on its donor (*OED* s.v. *motley* n. and adj., def. 3). Marcus ruins things further by letting on that Marian is planning to follow this gift with a green bicycle for Leo's birthday, because "you are green yourself" (175). Again, despite the growing clarity, moral issues still lurk, hidden (in part) by a lack of appropriate terms: "There was a trap somewhere, I felt sure; and though I didn't know the term hush-money, its meaning flittered, bat-like, about my mind" (179).

In what I have been describing as an apprenticeship in deception, Leo starts by following 'rules' and ends with an abstract system of morality. He has discovered in himself "a strong sense of obligation in a matter that didn't really concern me – a sense of ought and ought not" (169). Further, he sees himself a "realist for whom the end justified the means", and so "such dissimulation as I practiced was necessary to my plan" (193). He has learnt to lie, and to withhold or overplay certain information in violation of conversational maxims, since "I had heard so many lies and lying is infectious" (197). But he has *also* been taught to involve

35 The connection is a familiar one: see, for example, Willmott's (1975) "What Leo Knew". On James and early twentieth-century constructions of adulthood see Michals (2011). For letters between Bowen and Hartley see Darwood (2012: 225–226). On Bowen's work in relation to the *Bildungsroman* see Esty (2012: 179–194).
36 In a review of Naomi Royde-Smith (whose understanding of children he thinks equal to Hugh Walpole and Kenneth Grahame), Hartley describes children's "strange matter-of-fact reasoning", the "consciousness of magic that accompanies their lives" (1928d: 23).

lying, dissimulation, innuendo, and a range of manipulations in moral situations where people can be means to his ends, since they have, by the elder Marian's admission, used *him* as an "instrument" (260).[37] This is a powerful fact about deception, at least in a Kantian framework, for "if we coerce or deceive others, their dissent, and so their genuine consent, is in principle ruled out", and so "we do indeed use others, treating them as mere props or tools in our own projects" (O'Neill 1985: 259).[38] Leo does feel "twinges of conscience" (193), but faced with Marian's growing meanness he has no qualms about using others as mere means. Thus he unwittingly causes his own shock encounter with sexuality by manipulating the last message, bringing about the assignation between Ted and Marian that he is then forced to witness. He has before taken on the role of "an editor as well as a messenger" (115) – in violation of the real nature of the element mercury as a "non-conductor" (205) – and changes the time of the meeting, hoping thereby to sow the "seed of distrust" (216).[39]

The consequences of this moral training are unflattering at best. They reveal an anxiety about moral development given that individual responsibility is liable to be denatured under social pressure. Leo wants to find expression for his individual qualities, to find his way with the higher classes: "I must increase my stature, I must act on a grander scale" (69). At the same time he feels, without being able to explain, that his yearning for self-expansion is only realistic within a defined social frame, as though growth were "not a solitary experience" but "linked inseparably with the expectation that I saw reflected in the faces round me" (88). He begins to confront, that is, the disciplinary normalization that takes place in school, where according to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* "distribution according to ranks or grades [...] marks the gaps, hierarchizes qualities, skills and aptitudes; but it also punishes and rewards" (1995: 181; see generally 170–194).[40] There is no way to ensure normative instruction outside of

---

37 Compare Grahame's comment on "the abiding sense of injustice, arising from the refusal of the Olympians ever to defend, to retract, to admit themselves in the wrong, or to accept similar concessions on our part" ([1895] 1979: 16).

38 O'Neill sees deception and consent as "corollar[ies] of the opacity of intentionality": "When we consent to another's proposals we consent, even when 'fully' informed, only to some specific formulation of what the other has it in mind to do. We may remain ignorant of further, perhaps equally pertinent, accounts of what is proposed, including some to which we would not consent" (1985: 256). Hartley mentions the means-end distinction in *The Novelist's Responsibility* (1967: 75).

39 Jones (1978: 105) sees such a "non-conductor" role as "emblematic of the 'registering' characters in Hartley" who observe without involvement.

40 Hartley ([1932] 1984: 76) describes Harrow in similar terms: the school fostered all "personal peculiarities" at the same time as it arranged a "careful tabulation of taboos".

social example, just as language and knowledge are both acquired "through social contact with helpful informants" (MacArthur 1990: 109).

This problem is at the root of Hartley's reactionary moral and social views. From his time at Oxford through the end of his life he was distressed by how interpersonal networks eroded individual responsibility, and attacked the welfare state as the expression of this trend. He despised A. L. Smith's lectures at Oxford, which described how "the state, as an embodiment of the community, could make the individual dance to its tune" (1968a: 255).[41] He criticized the undermining of "personal responsibility" in the theories of Marx and Freud (Hartley 1967: 10) and also lamented the "moral deterioration" and devaluation of individuality after World War II (1968a: 254).[42] Hartley's adoption of the *Bildungsroman* thus fits a tradition where resistance or indifference to the state is native to the genre's early ideals – particularly in Schiller, Humboldt, and Goethe (Moretti [1987] 2000: 52–55) – even as his conservatism rejects the anti-state orientations of other writers in the 1950s. Hartley resisted "compassion for men's misdeeds" (1967: 16), especially in his letters to *The Times*: praising corporal punishment as the expression of community standards (Hartley 1960); criticizing the moral level "which the internal combustion engine has done more than any other single factor to lower" (Hartley 1966a); and bemoaning the permissiveness that "amounts to an excuse for crime as being something outside the individual's control" (Hartley 1966b). Lamenting the euphemisms "anti-social" and "disturbed" to refer to "criminals" and "juvenile delinquents", Hartley wondered at the "harm done to morality by the suggestion that anti-social behaviour (whatever that means) describes an attitude of mind, curable by the psychiatrist, and not a moral state, curable (possibly) by the individual and his own efforts" (Hartley 1968b). His reactionary pose is tantamount to a moral indictment of *Bildung*, where that vision of creative self-expression has come to mean merely an acceptance of the welfare society's norms. To say "some defect of character or conduct which would once have unhesitatingly been called 'our fault' is now ascribed to causes over which we have no control" (Hartley 1967: 185) is, for Hartley, to accept the social attenuation of individual responsibility.

---

41 Smith espoused the sovereign capacity of the state to compel individuals, praising Hobbes, Maine, Rousseau, Locke, and Bosanquet, as against Hartley's interest in Mill and Spencer. Hartley called these "preposterous theories of obedience and sovereignty" in a letter to his mother (Wright 1996: 50–51).
42 See also "The Novelist and his Material" (first published in *TLS*, 15 August 1958) and "Some Aspects of Gregariousness" (first read at Oxford at a meeting of the Pagans [Wright 1996: 59]), both in Hartley (1967).

The acquisition of a sense of responsibility results from the "secret traffic" (143) for which Leo is the vehicle. That deception is intimately involved with 'development' is confirmed in one of the novel's potent images, the poisonous but beautiful nightshade that guards the outhouses where Ted and Marian have their trysts:

> All other plants [...] bloom for the eye; they are perfected for our view: the mysterious principle of growth is manifest in them. But this plant seemed to be up to something, to be carrying on a questionable traffic with itself. There was no harmony, no proportion in its parts. It exhibited all the stages of its development at once.[43] (177)

Presenting a vision of moral learning that necessarily involves deception, the compromise of trust, the distortion of language, and the instrumental use of people, Hartley gives a finer-grained account of damaged moral autonomy than we find in his later screeds. Freedom should *not* be, on his view, the freedom to deceive. *The Go-Between* thus presents a finesse of Hartley's postwar essays, reviews, and letters, nuancing their blunt indictments of a "collectivist age" where individuals have been "crushed by bureaucratic controls and the other restrictions of modern life" (Hartley 1967: 186, 14).[44] Looking back to the beginning of the "most changeful half a century in history" (250) in the midst of another volatile decade, the novel bequeaths to postwar Britain a deeply ambivalent vision of how children grow up and find their place when the society to which they must conform encourages deceit, distrust, and instrumental rationality.

4 Conclusion

In a lapidary moment in *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy (another significant Leo) claimed: "Pretence about anything sometimes deceives the wisest and shrewdest man, but, however cunningly it is hidden, a child of the meanest capacity feels it and is repelled by it" ([1877] 1998: 267). Hartley's novel divides this observation cruelly in two: the child does not feel, or properly discern, the deceptions in which he is involved; the adult pays the price. At the end of the novel, Leo realizes that "this attempt to discard my dual or multiple vision and achieve a single self

---

43 Melchiori (1960: 502–515) connects the nightshade to Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter"; Jones (1978: 106) sees its destruction as the removal of an obstacle to knowledge.
44 For comments on Hartley's conservatism see Webster (1970: 155) and (1961); Allen (1964: 254); Higdon (1984: 29); and Schöneich (1999: 151). His fiction, too, depreciated in the 1960s, becoming "a platform for [his] detestation of the state and his strongly reactionary views on modern life" (Wright 2004).

was the greatest pretence" (233). The deception he finds outside the self produces a more rooted self-deception within. As Schöneich puts it, his double life "precludes a successful identity-formation [*Identitätsbildung*]", and he "fails in a world of experience governed by ambiguity and equivocality" (1999: 140, my translation). Among adults Leo became accustomed to "playing a part, which seemed to have taken in everybody, and most of all myself" (227), learning sleights of speech and mind that later play tricks on his own memory. After the revelation in the outhouses he undergoes a "breakdown" (245) that amounts to a reverse *Bildung*, a "progressive atrophy of curiosity" (247). No longer able to trust himself or believe in others he has acquired the "capacity for disbelief, so difficult to acquire" and "equally difficult to eradicate" (245). His various triumphs had been calls "to exchange the immunities of childhood for the responsibilities of the grown-up world", as though "a death but with a resurrection in prospect" (134). But this prospect of being restored to life is cruelly foreclosed. The adult Lionel substitutes for the "facts of life" a mere "life of facts" (247): a professional bibliographer, he records only the objective stratum of entities that "existed independently of me, [...] which my private wishes could not add to or subtract from" (247).

When he confronts the found objects, then, layered with the "patina of age", the "recollection of what each had meant to me" returns with the undeniable (if faint) force of the "magnets' power to draw", as though Lionel might now raise his emotional temperature, get the mercury moving once more (5). The diary threatens his uneasy compromise with life, prodding his memory and carrying its "message of disappointment and defeat" (6). His attempt to parse the "chiaroscuro" (28) of his memory – with its "different levels" (82) and realizations it constantly "fights shy of" (19) – leads to unreliable narration. Phrases like 'I have an impression that' and 'I must have' abound, and perhaps owing to the diary's being in code, recollections occur only "as a series of unrelated impressions, without time sequence, but each with a distinct *feeling* attaching to it" (28). These gestures have been compared to more studied representations of narrative deception, as in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* or McEwan's *Atonement*, a text indebted to Hartley's (Ingersoll 2004: 242). But they are more erratic and conspicuous, as though these "disputed records of self-examination" (Hartley 1967: 194) showed something different for Hartley, perhaps his own self-deception with respect to the autobiographical kernel of this novel. "Nothing is so difficult for a writer", one of his many reviews reads, "as to be successfully different from his ordinary self – or even to be different at all" (Hartley 1928a: 230).

"Thanks to my interment policy", Lionel notes, "I had come to terms with life, I had made a working – working was the word – arrangement with it, on the one condition that there should be no exhumation" (16). When he ponders his wasted

life, he is at least able to recognize a benefit of this dreary self-assessment. Those eighteen summer days, he sees, are the "more complete, the more unforgotten, for being carefully embalmed" (16), and all the sepulchral imagery that attends Leo's narrative – "buried memories" (28) that come through the opening of "cerements" and "coffins" and "vaults" (18) – may suggest that some supernatural element is still in play in this assessment of the past. When he considers his papers looming "with indented outlines like the cliffs of Thanet" (18), the allusion to the Greek for death (*thanatos*) seems to signal the presence of a wraith flitting about the attic. Perhaps the spirit animating the frame of this novel is that more protean ancestor of Mercury, not merely the god of trade, commerce, and roads, as in Roman myth, but the Greek Hermes, the architect of all "going-between: between the dead and the living, but also between the latent and the manifest" (Kermode 1979: 2). Significantly for this novel, Hermes is the god of merchants and tradesmen; of oracles, heralds, interpreters, and the eloquent; of thieves and all those stealthy in looks, language, and actions; of oaths, magic, and 'spell-binding'; and of the passage between the living and the dead. In Homer's phrase a *trēktēr* or "hired boundary-crosser" (Brown [1947] 1969: 45–46), Hermes shows in his fleet and restless energy that, even for lives ruined by "questionable traffic" – the concealment that brings us a self, the apprenticeship in pretense that fashions a genre – there is one final accommodation to be had.[45]

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor W. 1951/1978. "Theses Against Occultism". In: Theodor W. Adorno. *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. Trans. E. F. N. Jephcott. London: Verso. 128–134.

Adorno, Theodor W. 1936/1982. "Über Jazz". In: Theodor W. Adorno. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Volume 17: *Musikalische Schriften IV*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. 74–108.

Adorno, Theodor W. 1994. *The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*. Ed. Stephen Crook. London/New York: Routledge.

Allen, Walter. 1964. *The Modern Novel in Britain and the United States*. New York: Dutton.

Allsop, Kenneth. 1958. *The Angry Decade: A Survey of the Cultural Revolt of the Nineteen-Fifties*. London: Owen.

Athos, John. 1962. "L. P. Hartley and the Gothic Infatuation". *Twentieth-Century Literature* 7: 172–179.

Austin, J. L. 1970. *Philosophical Papers*. Ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

---

45 On Hermes see Fairbanks (1907: 195–202); Brown ([1947] 1969: 3–32); Kahn (1978: 119–164); Kerényi (1986: 53–91); and Kermode (1979: 1–2).

Austin, J. L. 1975. *How to Do Things with Words*. Ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Baier, Annette. 1986. "Trust and Antitrust". *Ethics* 96.2: 231–260.

Baier, Annette. 1989. "Trusting Ex-Intimates". In: George Graham and Hugh LaFollette (eds.). *Person to Person*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. 269–281.

Baier, Annette. 1992. "Trust". In: *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. Volume 13. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press. 109–174.

Bien, Peter. 1963. *L. P. Hartley*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Birch, Dinah (ed.). 2009. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. 7th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boes, Tobias. 2012. *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Bildungsroman*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Bok, Sissela. 1999. *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*. 2nd ed. New York: Vintage.

Brown, Norman O. 1947/1969. *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth*. New York: Vintage.

Burton, Arthur. 1961. "On the Nature of Loneliness". *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 21: 34–39.

Castle, Gregory. 2006. *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman*. Gainsville, FL: University Press of Florida.

Cecil, Robert. 1969. *Life in Edwardian England*. London: Batsford.

Coles, Robert. 1981. "Children as Moral Observers". In: *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. Volume 2. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press: 119–142.

Coles, Robert. 1986. *The Moral Life of Children*. Boston, MA: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Craik, Roger. 2005. "The Ache of Victorianism: L. P. Hartley and Kenneth Grahame". *Atenea* 25.2: 125–141.

Curry, Patrick. 1992. *A Confusion of Prophets: Victorian and Edwardian Astrology*. London: Collins & Brown.

Darwood, Nicola. 2012. *World of Lost Innocence: The Fiction of Elizabeth Bowen*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Esty, Jed. 2012. *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fairbanks, Arthur. 1907. *The Mythology of Greece and Rome, Presented with Special Reference to its Influence on Literature*. New York: Appleton.

Ferrebe, Alice. 2012. *Literature of the 1950s: Good, Brave Causes*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Forster, E. M. 1910/1973. *Howard's End*. Ed. Oliver Stallybrass. The Abinger Edition of E. M. Forster. London: Edward Arnold.

Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. 2nd ed. New York: Vintage.

Fromm-Reichman, Frieda. 1959. "Loneliness". *Psychiatry* 22: 1–15.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2003. *Truth and Method*. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. 2nd ed. New York: Continuum.

Gavin, Adrienne E. and Andrew H. Humphries (eds.). 2009. *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction: Worlds Enough and Time*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gordon, Lois. 1972. "*The Go-Between*: Hartley by Pinter". *Kansas Quarterly* 4.2: 81–92.

Grahame, Kenneth. 1895/1979. *The Golden Age*. London: The Bodley Head.

Gray, W. Russel. 2007. "The Time in Our Minds: The Presence of the Past in *The Go-Between*". *Journal of Popular Culture* 40.4: 643–654.

Grice, H. P. 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Grossvogel, David I. 1974. "Under the Sign of Symbols: Losey and Hartley". *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 4.3: 51–56.

Hartley, L. P. 1928a. "New Fiction". *The Saturday Review* February 25: 230–231.

Hartley, L. P. 1928b. "New Fiction". *The Saturday Review* June 2: 706–707.

Hartley, L. P. 1928c. "New Fiction". *The Saturday Review* June 30: 842–844.

Hartley, L. P. 1928d. "New Fiction". *The Saturday Review* July 7: 22–24.

Hartley, L. P. 1932/1984. "The Conformer". In: Graham Greene (ed.). *Essays by Divers Hands*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 65–82.

Hartley, L. P. 1949. "New Fiction". *The Saturday Review* September 14: 302–303.

Hartley, L. P. 1953/1997. *The Go-Between*. Ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies. London: Penguin.

Hartley, L. P. 1953/2002. *The Go-Between*. Ed. Colm Tóibín. New York: New York Review Books.

Hartley, L. P. 1960. "Corporal Punishment [Letter to the Editor]". *The Times* November 24: 13.

Hartley, L. P. 1966a. "Road Deaths [Letter to the Editor]". *The Times* January 5: 11.

Hartley, L. P. 1966b. "'New Attitude to Crime' [Letter to the Editor]". *The Times* July 11: 13.

Hartley, L. P. 1967. *The Novelist's Responsibility*. London: H. Hamilton.

Hartley, L. P. 1968a. "Three Wars". In: George A. Panichas (ed.). *Promise of Greatness: The War of 1914–1918*. London: Cassell. 250–258.

Hartley, L. P. 1968b. "Words and Deeds [Letter to the Editor]". *The Times* March 4: 9.

Hartley, L. P. 1970. "Fiction and Dr. Leavis [Letter to the Editor]". *Times Literary Supplement* August 14: 902–903.

Head, Dominic (ed.). 2006. *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Higdon, David Leon. 1984. *Shadows of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction*. London: Macmillan.

Hirsch, Marianne. 1979. "The Novel of Formation as Genre: Between Great Expectations and Lost Illusions". *Genre* 12.3: 293–311.

Ingersoll, Earl G. 2004. "Intertextuality in L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* and Ian McEwan's *Atonement*". *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 40.3: 241–258.

James, Henry. 1897/1985. *What Maisie Knew*. London/New York: Penguin.

Jones, Edward T. 1973. "Summer of 1900: *A la recherche* of *The Go-Between*". *Literature/Film Quarterly* 1.2: 154–160.

Jones, Edward T. 1978. *L. P. Hartley*. Boston, MA: Twayne.

Kahn, Robert. 1978. *Hermès passe, ou les ambiguïtés de la communication*. Paris: François Maspero.

Kerényi, Karl. 1986. *Hermes: Guide of Souls*. Trans. Murray Stein. Dallas, TX: Spring.

Kermode, Frank. 1979. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kipling, Rudyard. 1891/1893. "Children of the Zodiac". In: Rudyard Kipling. *Many Inventions*. 4th ed. New York: D. Appleton. 400–424.

Lukács, Georg. 1920/1971. *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*. Trans. Anna Bostock. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

MacArthur, Fiona. 1988. "Age, Language, and Social Status in L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*". *Anglo-American Studies* 8.2: 202–210.

MacArthur, Fiona. 1990. "Miscommunication, Language Development, and Enculturation in L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*". *Style* 24.1: 103–112.

MacArthur, Fiona. 1992. *The Fictional Dialogue of L. P. Hartley*. Salamanca: Universidad de
Extremadura.
March-Russell, Paul. 2009. "Pagan Papers: History, Mysticism, and Edwardian Childhood". In:
Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew H. Humphries (eds.). *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction: Worlds
Enough and Time*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 23–36.
Melchiori, Giorgio. 1960. "The English Novelist and the American Tradition". *Sewanee Review*
68.3: 502–515.
Michals, Teresa. 2011. "Henry James and the Invention of Adulthood". *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*
44.2: 229–248.
Moan, Margaret A. 1973. "Setting and Structure: An Approach to Hartley's *The Go-Between*".
Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction 15.2: 27–36.
Moretti, Franco. 1987/2000. *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture*.
Trans. Albert Sbragia. New ed. London/New York: Verso.
"Mr. L. P. Hartley: Distinguished Novelist and A Consummate Artist [Obituary]". *The Times*
14 December 1972: 19.
Mudrick, Marvin. 1955. "Humanity is the Principle". *Hudson Review* 7.4: 610–619.
Mulkeen, Anne. 1974. *Wild Thyme, Winter Lightning: The Symbolic Novels of L. P. Hartley*.
London: Hamish Hamilton/Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
OED = The Oxford English Dictionary. 2000–. 3rd ed online. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/> [last accessed 1 September 2015].
O'Neill, Onora. 1985. "Between Consenting Adults". *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14.3:
252–277.
Perrin, Tom. 2011. "Rebuilding *Bildung*: The Middlebrow Novel of Aesthetic Education in the Mid-
Twentieth-Century United States". *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 44.3: 382–401.
Piaget, Jean. 1965. *The Moral Judgment of the Child*. Trans. Marjorie Gabain. New York: Free
Press.
Priestley, J. B. 1970. *The Edwardians*. London: Heinemann.
Pritchard, R. E. 1980. "L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*". *Critical Quarterly* 22.1: 45–55.
Radley, Alan. 1987. "Psychological Realism in L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*". *Literature and
Psychology* 33.2: 1–10.
Redfield, Marc. 1996. *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*. Ithaca,
NY: Cornell University Press.
Riley, Michael and James Palmer. 1978. "Time and the Structure of Memory in *The Go-Between*".
College Literature 5: 219–227.
Ritchie, Harry. 1988. *Success Stories: Literature and the Media in England, 1950–1959*. London:
Faber and Faber.
Rose, Jonathan. 1986. *The Edwardian Temperament, 1895–1919*. Athens, OH: Ohio University
Press.
Sammons, Jeffrey L. 1981. "The Mystery of the Missing *Bildungsroman*, or: What Happened to
Wilhelm Meister's Legacy?" *Genre* 14: 229–246.
Schlüssel, Angelika. 2005. "Making a Political Statement or Refusing to Grow Up: Reflections on
the Situation of the Academic Youth in Postwar British Literature". *The American Journal of
Psychoanalysis* 65.4: 381–403.
Schöneich, Christoph. 1999. *Edmund Talbot und seine Brüder: Englische Bildungsromane nach
1945*. Tübingen: Narr.
Sinyard, Neil. 1980. "Pinter's *Go-Between*". *Critical Quarterly* 22.3: 21–33.
Snow, C. P. 1958. "Challenge to the Intellect". *Times Literary Supplement* August 15: iii.

Tolstoy, Leo. 1877/1998. *Anna Karenina*. Trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Walvin, James. 1982. *Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood, 1800–1914*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Webster, Harvey Curtis. 1961. "The Novels of L. P. Hartley". *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* 4.2: 39–51.

Webster, Harvey Curtis. 1970. *After the Trauma: Representative British Novelists Since 1920*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

Willmott, Michael B. 1975. "'What Leo Knew': The Childhood World of L. P. Hartley". *English* 24: 3–10.

Winnicott, D. W. 1958. "The Capacity to be Alone". *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 39.5: 416–420.

Wood, Michael. 1971. "Losey's Hartley: *The Go-Between*". *New Society* September 23: 574–575.

Wright, Adrian. 1996. *Foreign Country: The Life of L. P. Hartley*. London: André Deutsch.

Wright, Adrian. 2004. "Hartley, Leslie Poles (1895–1972)". *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Online. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31208> [last accessed 1 July 2015].

Wyndham, Francis. 1953. "Manners and Morals [Rev. of *The Go-Between*, by L. P. Hartley]". *Times Literary Supplement* November 6: 708.